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Brazil

Against the expulsions of PT parliamentarians

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The resolution which follows was adopted by the seventh National Conference of the Socialist Democracy Tendency of the Brazilian Workers' Party (PT).

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Parliamentarian comrades of the PT have been suspended from their group and some, moreover, are threatened with expulsion. The main reason is that they have expressed divergences in relation to pension reform, as well as the fact that they have voted or announced their intention to vote in a different way from the orientation approved by the majority leadership of the party.

We completely disagree with all these sanctions, and especially with the threats of expulsion. It should be taken into account when considering this question that the parliamentarians punished or threatened with sanctions have voted in accordance with positions long defended by the entire PT, including in the electoral campaign of 2002 - positions that had been only recently changed by the majority of the party leadership, following decisions taken by the government.

Moreover, the positions assumed by these parliamentarians are in accordance with the [trade union confederation] CUT (which recommended a vote against the proposed pensions reform) and with bodies in the civil service, besides being defended equally by other sectors of the social movement, and innumerable specialists in the pensions question linked to the PT. Indeed, the PT has always sought to represent the legitimate aspirations of the social movements; this is one of the characteristics that form part of the basic identity of the party. Moreover, 24 representatives of the PT who voted in favour of the government proposal had expressed disagreement with its content in a public statement.

Those parliamentarians who abstained or voted against the proposal had acted, therefore, in accordance with the traditions of the PT (and with broad sectors of the party still today), as well as with the position of fundamental sectors of the working class. If the suspensions are upheld and, worse still, expulsions are carried out, the PT leadership will be attacking not only those parliamentarians directly punished and diverse sectors of the party that agree with their position, but also fundamental sectors of the working class. In particular, the expulsion of these parliamentarians would also amount to an aggression against the CUT.

It is also necessary to take into account that the change of position that resulted in the proposals included in the pensions reform was carried through by the government and the majority of the party leadership without a satisfactory discussion. There was no proper debate in the leadership of the PT, not even in the parliamentary group. Moreover, in the seminar promoted by the PT and the Perseu Abramo Foundation in May, the broad majority of the positions expressed were against the proposals put forward by the federal government in alliance with the state governments. However, the content of this seminar was completely ignored by the federal government and the majority of the PT leadership. The unity in action of the parliamentary group has always been defended by the PT. However, the party always took into account the possibility that, in certain votes where questions of conscience were at stake, parliamentarians would be able to vote in different ways from the majority position.

However, the situation in the PT during the debate on pensions was characterized by a very special situation, for these reasons: the position upheld by the majority of the party leadership, following the position of the federal government, resulted from very recent changes, carried through without broad debate, and in conflict with positions long defended by the entire PT. They also conflicted with the positions of fundamental sectors of the working class.

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There are more reasons than one, then, for parliamentarians to invoke objections of conscience to diverge from the majority position. To aggravate things, the final decision on pensions reform was made at a meeting of the national leadership before it had been exactly defined what proposal would be submitted to the vote - a procedure that robs it of any authority.

In these conditions, to impose a majority discipline, and make threats of expulsion, is a procedural nonsense. It has no democratic legitimacy. It would have the serious consequence of moving the PT away from fundamental sectors of the working class. It would clash with the tradition of democracy and pluralism in the PT

At the moment, a great debate is underway on the treatment of the question of genetically modified foods, that divides the federal government and the PT. In this case, the position adopted by the party leadership with relation to the existing divergences was much more correct than that adopted on the pensions reform.

It is important to point out that there are many similarities between the two debates. The government adopted a provisional measure allowing the plantation of genetically modified soya in the next harvest, in opposition to positions upheld by the PT, including in the recent electoral campaign; this measure has met opposition from many parliamentarians in the party, as well as from important social movements (the environmental movement, agricultural workers, the CUT). The change in position was not properly debated. Many parliamentarians had expressed opposition to the measures taken by the government.

To try to prevent the exit of comrade Fernando Gabeira from the PT, the national president of the party has already announced that each parliamentarian could vote in accordance with their convictions. This attitude is exactly what one would expect from the president of the PT. The same attitude should have been adopted in the discussion on pensions reform. In place of threats of expulsion of parliamentarians, it would have been better to take into account their positions (and those of all the sectors of the PT and the social movement who agree with them).

The PT has always been proud of being a democratic and pluralist party, and having deep links with the working class. It cannot, now that it has very much bigger responsibilities, move radically and start to behave as a transmission belt of the government, breaking in this with fundamental sectors of its social base.

The expulsion threat is still more absurd when we take into account that there has been an increasing number of affiliations, or announced filiations, to the PT of parliamentarians elected for other parties, with no tradition of struggle on the left or in the popular movements. If the PT is open to parliamentarians and other personalities who do not have a left history, and at the same time it is clashing with legitimate social movements and very importantly, with fundamental sectors of the working class, and if moreover it is still banishing parliamentarians with a long tradition from popular struggles and defence of the positions of the party, it will be taking a step on the road to a serious loss of some of its more basic qualities.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/10_hh.jpg]

The most absurd and unacceptable expulsion threat is that of comrade Heloãsa Helena. This comrade began her political militancy in the PT; she always had a decisive role in the fight against the powerful oligarchies of the State of Alagoas and the whole northeast. She was leader of the PT in the Senate of the Republic, with a shining and militant record. She is part of the National Leadership of the party and its National Executive Commission. She is, without doubt, one of the most prestigious PT leaders in the country. The positions that the friend has defended, including in the debate over pensions reform, are the same positions that she defended when she was leader of the PT in the Senate.

The threatened expulsion of comrade Heloãsa Helena at the next meeting of the National Leadership would

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besmirch the history of the PT. It would be a step in the direction of a serious erosion of the PT's character as a socialist and workers' party. It would represent an enormous blow to the relationship of the party with fundamental sectors of the Brazilian working class and the popular movements of the country. It would be, therefore, completely unacceptable, and it would compel us to appeal immediately to the next National Meeting of the party, and to demand its reversal.

In place of an arbitrary and authoritarian measure such as this, what the situation of the country and the PT demands is respect, along the lines suggested by comrade Genoio, on the question of the divergence on environmental questions. The government needs to listen more to the party.

It is necessary to add that the serious divergences inside the government, which have become public on the question of genetically modified foods as on the question of the FTAA, must be debated by the PT, and the position of the party and the social movements must be taken into account.

For these reasons, we will from today direct a public campaign against the threats of expulsion, and in particular in defence of comrade Heloisa Helena.

São Paulo, November 22, 2003.